

The following review appeared in the January 1984 issue of Softalk Magazine.

## Rogue

Milo was sweating heavily in his armor. A trickle of blood from the snake bite on his left ankle was gradually filling his boot. He squinted at the darkness, nervously shifting his mace from hand to hand.

Milo hated the dark. He hated the humidity, the slimy walls, the silence. He hated everything about this creepy labyrinth. Damn the guildmasters! Let them find their own cursed amulet. What right had they to send him here to die like the others?

They hadn't told him about the others. But now, when it was too late, he kept finding them. Or what was left of them. Mostly just a scattering of bones on the cavern floor. Sometimes he could make out the remains of a suit of armor, like the one the guildmasters had given him, or a mace like the one in his right hand. One of the corpses, more prosperous than the rest, had owned a silver wand. It was now in Milo's pack.

Wait! What was that? Something came shuffling out of the darkness. An enormous troll! He couldn't fight that!

As the troll swung at him, Milo reached for the silver wand. He flourished it with a gesture he had once seen a wizard use.

The troll was gone! There was just a big plant sitting there, viney-looking, with a big pulpy flower. Milo smiled with satisfaction. With this great wand, he was invincible.

Then a thought troubled him. If the original owner had had this great wand, how come he was dead?

If you have played *Dungeons & Dragons* or the like, Milo's story will seem familiar. If not, you may not understand the attractions of finding gold and slaying monsters in the dank confines of a labyrinthine dungeon. Suffice to say, this kind of game has been popular for about ten years. It can be addictive, especially for younger players.

*Rogue* was originally written under Unix and has now been adapted for PC-DOS.

You start on level 1 of the dungeon with twelve hit points and sixteen strength points. You are wearing a suit of +1 ring mail. You also have a magical mace, a +1 bow, and some depressingly normal arrows. Your most important piece of equipment, however, is the sandwich in your pocket. You can fight with your bare hands if necessary, but there's no substitute for food, and starvation is a major threat.

From this standing start, you can proceed to scrounge up the really interesting stuff—wands, potions, magic scrolls, rings of protection, improved weaponry—all scattered around rather liberally (this is what gamers sometimes call a "gilded hole").

Offsetting this bounty is an alphabet of monsters, from aquator to zombie. Each has a special *modus operandi*. An ice monster will try to numb you, an aquator will rust away your armor, a wraith will steal your hit points. A nymph will smile seductively and try to pick your pocket. As you kill the monsters, you progress in your trade as fighter, increasing the number of hits you can absorb.

You also accumulate valuable knowledge. The various treasures in the dungeon are hard to identify. A staff of light, for example, may be described simply as "a banyan staff." This changes from game to game, so "a red potion" may heal you in one game and poison you in the next. As each game progresses, you accumulate a large number of items, some tried and true, others unknown and possibly cursed. Hitting the

D key at any point displays the knowledge you have accumulated, so you can make clever little decisions like, "I know this scroll labeled 'orgevsakspo' isn't the one that fries brains, so it's probably safe to read it."

Everything appears on the screen as characters from the standard set. Your hero is a "happy face," the monsters are represented by letters, the dungeon walls are simple lines, and so on. Although the graphics aren't very exciting (needless to say), this feature means the game looks equally good with either display adapter.

The only things that show up on the display are the ones your character knows about. Some rooms are brightly lit, but as you descend, more and more are dark. This creates an atmosphere of mystery as your character creeps around with one hand to the wall, not knowing if a monster is waiting to pounce on him. To heighten this effect, there are traps and secret doors that are invisible unless you stop and search for them. Some of the monsters are invisible, too. The cumulative effect is quite spooky, like being in a strange house at night or driving in a thick fog.

Unfortunately, the game has some less admirable complications. Your possessions, for example, are identified by letter, and the letters keep changing. As a result, throwing item F might mean shooting an arrow one minute and discarding a valuable healing potion the next. Also, it is annoying that the monsters don't seem to be affected by the traps. However, the biggest problem with this game is that it's so hard to stop playing. The maze is enormous, and even when you're killed you're inclined to try again.

Milo gasped in horror as the plant's tendril wrapped itself hungrily around his leg . . . .

*Rogue*, by Michael C. Toy, Kenneth C.R.C. Arnold, and Jon Lane. AIDesign Systems (1989 Santa Cruz Avenue, Santa Clara, CA 95051; 408-296-1634). Requires 128K, \$44.95.

Look for Jerry Pournelle's review of *Rogue* in an upcoming issue of *Byte Magazine*.